

Chicken Little's Guide to Unit Studies

By Cindy Downes

During my years as a homeschool consultant, many parents expressed a desire to do unit studies but were afraid to try. They were stuck on textbooks and didn't like it. I suggested a compromise that I affectionately call Chicken Little's Guide to Unit Studies.

General Instructions:

Select one history and one science textbook at your oldest child's grade level. The publisher is up to you.

I suggest scheduling a four-day school week, leaving one day for activities outside the home. This provides 144 lesson days (36 weeks x 4 days per week).

Divide the number of pages in the textbook by 36 weeks. Example: Bob Jones Heritage Studies 6, with 294 pages, results in eight pages per week. Add or subtract pages each day as needed to allow for good stopping points in the text.

Spend about one hour per day each on history and science; or, better yet, teach history two days a week and science two days a week. In the latter case, spend about two hours per day on each subject, combining two days' activities into one.

Obtain supplies and plan activities at least one month in advance.

Recordkeeping:

Have each child create a notebook (portfolio) to demonstrate learning (http://www.howtohomeschooltoday.com/how_to_homeschool/assessment_tools/portfolio/).

List books read. Include worksheets and compositions completed, as well as photos of projects, activities and field trips. Keep track of your lessons in The Checklist (http://www.howtohomeschooltoday.com/shop/the_checklist/). There's no need for grades, but if you must grade, give them an A for completing the assignment.

Chicken Little's Teaching Method:

Day 1: Read the entire week's textbook assignment together (history, reading, listening skills, comprehension). Allow your children to read if they desire. This is NOT a reading lesson. Make it fun for all ages. Discuss the contents, encouraging all children to contribute. Use questions included in the textbook for discussion or let each child tell you what he or she learned. Leave charts, graphs, sidebars and homework questions for Day 2.

Day 2: Read over sidebars, maps, timelines, charts, and graphs. If a map is included, have your children create a map for their notebooks (geography). Have them create a timeline of events (history) and a glossary (vocabulary), as appropriate. Use these words for spelling, if desired (spelling). Discuss any remaining questions in the textbook.

Day 3: Composition: Have each child select a topic of interest from the lesson. Assign a writing project on that topic according to the skill level of the child. For example, your second-grader may enjoy learning that the Sumerians were the first to use wheels. Assign him an easy reader about wheels (library research and reading), have him draw a variety of wheels (science, art—use clip art if not artistic), and write a sentence about each wheel under the drawing (composition). Your sixth-grader might enjoy learning about

archaeology. Have her research famous archaeologists (research) and write a newspaper story (composition) about one of them. Add these pages to their portfolios. (See my website for writing project ideas: http://www.howtohomeschooltoday.com/freebies/teacher_tools/writing_project_ideas/)

Day 4: Although you'll need to teach phonics, penmanship, and math individually, you can incorporate other subjects (and learning styles) by including a variety of activities on Day 4. Example: For visual learners, watch a video on castles; for auditory learners, listen to music of the Middle Ages; for kinesthetic learners, create a model of a castle. Find more activity ideas on my website: <http://www.oklahomahomeschool.com/projectideas.html>.

That's it—Chicken Little's Guide to Unit Studies. It makes learning, and teaching, much more fun!



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